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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: AU/PING MISSION FAILS TO PERSUADE RAJOELINA

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: AU Chairman Jean Ping, accompanied by a delegation from SADC, the UN, COI, and the OIF, met with Madagascar's political leaders January 21-22 to propose a compromise solution for implementing the Maputo and Addis Ababa accords. De facto president Rajoelina immediately rejected Ping's approach, although Ping encouraged him to reconsider over the next 15 days and hopes he has not heard the HAT's last word. In a reversal of prior statements, both Ping and the French Ambassador said that they supported the return of SADC mediator Chissano if Rajoelina was willing to re-engage in negotiations. If Rajoelina definitively rejects the olive branch offered by Ping by February 5, the AU is likely to move to targeted sanctions against the HAT. African heads of state might take this up during the upcoming AU Summit; if not, the issue will wait until the next AU Peace and Security Council meeting, to take place by February 15. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) African Union Chairman Jean Ping, accompanied by Peace and Security Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra, visited Madagascar January 21-22 in an effort to encourage Madagascar's leaders to apply the agreements that they had signed in Maputo and Addis Ababa in 2009. During his stay, he met with de facto president Rajoelina (tete-a-tete lunch), co-presidents Andrianirina and Rakotovahiny, consensus PM Mangalaza, TGV's PM Vital, other members of the Ravalomanana/Zafy/Ratsiraka movements, military and civil society leaders, and the local representatives of the International Contact Group.

¶3. (SBU) Ping presented a "compromise solution" to the four movements which demanded the application of the signed Maputo I and Addis accords, while clarifying a few points of contention regarding the roles of the president and co-presidents. The proposal followed a principled approach, in line with the positions of the USG and SADC, rather than following the tack of HAT appeasement recommended in the French proposal before the visit. The compromise solution maintained the two co-presidents; assigned Ravalomanana's appointed co-president to carry out transition goals and Zafy's appointed co-president to focus on development issues; allowed acts taken by the president in cabinet meetings that were not co-signed by the two co-presidents as required by the Addis accord to be reviewed a second time by the cabinet for approval; granted the president precedence on protocol issues; and empowered the cabinet to determine the role of the two co-presidents on protocol matters. It reaffirmed Eugene Mangalaza, dismissed by TGV in December, as the consensus prime minister and stated that the fair manner of dividing ministerial portfolios among the four movements agreed to in Addis should be maintained. The compromise solution also recommended that a constitutional referendum should be held first, followed by legislative and presidential elections at the same time no later than October. Finally, the amnesty agreements reached in Maputo should be respected, and the amnesty law should be passed by the transition senate and congress.

¶4. (SBU) Although the Ravalomanana, Ratsiraka, and Zafy movements appeared pleased by the AU proposal, Rajoelina rejected it immediately. In a likely pre-cooked written statement, Rajoelina

avowed that "cohabitation" was impossible and requested support for rapid elections.

15. (SBU) In a briefing of the ICG members following the first day's events, Ping explained that the purpose of his mission was to unblock implementation of the Maputo I and Addis accords. Most diplomats were in agreement that the compromise solution would fail due to the HAT's rejection. Ping did not disagree, but said that if the Malagasy would like to re-launch negotiations, President Chissano would take the lead as mediation was outside the scope of Ping's mandate for this visit. Ping suggested that, given the likelihood of a failure of the Maputo process, targeted sanctions against the HAT might be discussed at the AU summit in late January, or delayed for Peace and Security Council consideration between February 5 and 15. The French Ambassador was visibly upset by the suggestion of sanctions and engaged in an undiplomatic exchange with Ping on the issue. Ping asserted that the AU must stick to its principles against coups and also respect the SADC's views. In the end, the French Ambassador assured Ping that France would continue to support the AU's lead here.

16. (SBU) Following further meetings the next day, Ping again briefed the ICG late on Jan 22. He said that despite the letter from TGV rejecting the compromise proposal, which he asserted was mainly for domestic consumption, some HAT representatives - even TGV's hard-line adviser Norbert Lala Ratsirahonana -- appeared open to discussions. All four movements, even the HAT, discussed the establishment of the AU-SADC-OIF-UN follow-up mechanism for implementation of the Maputo accords in Madagascar. However, as there is nothing currently in place to monitor, the follow-up mechanism will not be implemented, Ping said. Ping was not overly optimistic, but thought that the HAT might be willing to make concessions when faced with the now-serious threat of sanctions. He added that the AU did not consider TGV's letter as the HAT's final response, but would give them the full 15-day period, through Feb 5, to reflect and respond.

17. (SBU) The French Ambassador noted that he had received frantic

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calls from HAT representatives all Friday morning, indicating their concern about the possible ramifications (read sanctions) of their actions [Comment: from which they now realize the French will be unable to protect them. End comment.] In a surprising reversal of prior statements and/or apparent positions, both the French Ambassador and Jean Ping said that they supported the return of SADC mediator Chissano if the HAT was willing to re-engage in negotiations. Ping suggested several times that the HAT may be willing to re-engage if they can save face by maintaining their Prime Minister Camille Vital as the "Consensus Prime Minister" called for under Maputo I. As Vital is known as a "Ratsirakiste" and according to prior agreement it was Ratsiraka who provided the PM names for approval by the four movements, Ping thought there was a possibility of Vital being retained as the new "consensus PM". The French clearly also support retention of Vital, their ambassador having argued that his presence was key to maintaining stability within the military.

18. (SBU) Five representatives of the Zafy movement told the ambassador Jan 22 that unilateral elections can not resolve the political crisis and asserted that the risk for the country would be extremely serious if the three opposition movements were excluded from the transition government. They expressed concern about the ambiguous position of France and the actions of certain French nationals, suggesting clearly that reprisals against French nationals and interests may become frequent if the French do not alter their "meddling" approach. They said the military is the key to Rajoelina's power and noted that the opposition movements are reaching out to sympathetic military leaders to urge them to not support Rajoelina but to "remain neutral". They argued that the Malagasy people and the army react slowly after events, but assured us that after some time, they would react "correctly". Due to the lack of rule of law, increase in corruption, rising number of armed attacks, and the encouragement of the three opposition movements, the people, they argued, would eventually rise up and attack those that are benefitting from this crisis.

19. (SBU) Consensus Prime Minister Mangalaza met with the ambassador on Saturday to reaffirm his willingness "to be of service" if needed. He is returning to his home outside Tamatave, for both security and financial reasons; he no longer receives any support

from the government and presumably is having to pay for his hotel room and all other expenses himself. He reported that Vital had given Ping a formal letter requesting his designation as "Consensus Prime Minister" instead of Mangalaza. The conversation with Mangalaza raised the strong possibility that he had become unacceptable not so much to Rajoelina (with whom he never had any particular confrontation) as to the French: Mangalaza recounted several instances of attempted French strong-arming, which he resisted, much to their chagrin. At the same time, there is indeed a major issue of face-saving involved in the identity of the consensus prime minister following Rajoelina's firing of Mangalaza, and no individual should be deemed irreplaceable. A Saturday call to the ambassador by a HAT insider also suggested that the HAT may be looking at finding a more acceptable substitute for co-President Fetison Andrianirina, whose strong public words against Rajoelina and the HAT also raise issues of face and compatibility in any cohabitation. That the HAT is examining such potential personnel changes gives some small hope that the HAT will opt to resurrect Maputo and Addis after all, but such "insider" glimmers generally have proven false in the past.

¶10. (SBU) A former presidential candidate, not affiliated with the four movements, reiterated to Emboff separately that the Malagasy are slow to react. They build up grievances one by one and then explode, she explained. It is unclear when that point may come, but she predicted that it might occur once the results of a unilaterally-organized presidential election were known. She would like to mobilize people to stop TGV from moving unilaterally forward to what she believes will be rigged legislative and presidential elections, but complained that she lacks financial resources and feels powerless to stop this high speed train.

¶11. (SBU) Other Malagasy citizens that are paying attention to politics - even Ravalomanana supporters -- have told us alternatively that they support rapid elections. Some argue that once the elections are held, it will be obvious that TGV lacks a support base, while others argue that the crisis will continue until elections are held so it would be best to have them as soon as possible. As long as the international community is divided and perceived to be supporting both sides (HAT and opposition), each side will feel buoyed and will continue to perpetuate the crisis, others argue. Some contacts argue that there will be a civil war if elections go forward, while others see civil war as a stronger possibility if the crisis drags on without elections. Ping said that certain colonels and generals with whom his delegation met implied that they might be pushed into committing a coup d'etat if the politicians continued to take the country down a dead-end road. He of course advised them to stay in their barracks, but recognized that they might not.

¶12. (SBU) Comment and Action Recommendation: Our view is that the

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unilateral election plan envisioned by the HAT would in fact perpetuate and aggravate the crisis by further postponing national reconciliation and forcing a confrontation; reconciliation and renewed consensus are the prerequisites to elections, not vice versa (as some French may still believe). However, the international community's resistance to early, unilateral elections and its call for "inclusiveness and consensus" are not well understood by the majority of the population here who just want the crisis to end. We think it unlikely that the HAT will change its tune substantially or sufficiently in the next two weeks to avoid AU sanctions.

¶13. (SBU) Comment Continued: While remaining open to the possibility of a new negotiated solution under Chissano, we recommend that the USG begin preparing for the imposition of targeted travel bans and freezing of assets against Rajoelina, members of the HAT, and selected others, in coordination with the AU, SADC, and - hopefully - the EU. (Note: the EU must decide on its own "appropriate measures" - sanctions -- before the end of February). For our part, we have started on a draft list of target names. If the HAT responds positively to the AU's compromise proposal before Feb 5, negotiations could resume and the AU-UN-SADC-OIF follow-up mechanism would be established in Madagascar. However, in the more likely event that the HAT's response remains negative, sanctions will be the next step. End comment.

MARQUARDT